

JAMES I

and the

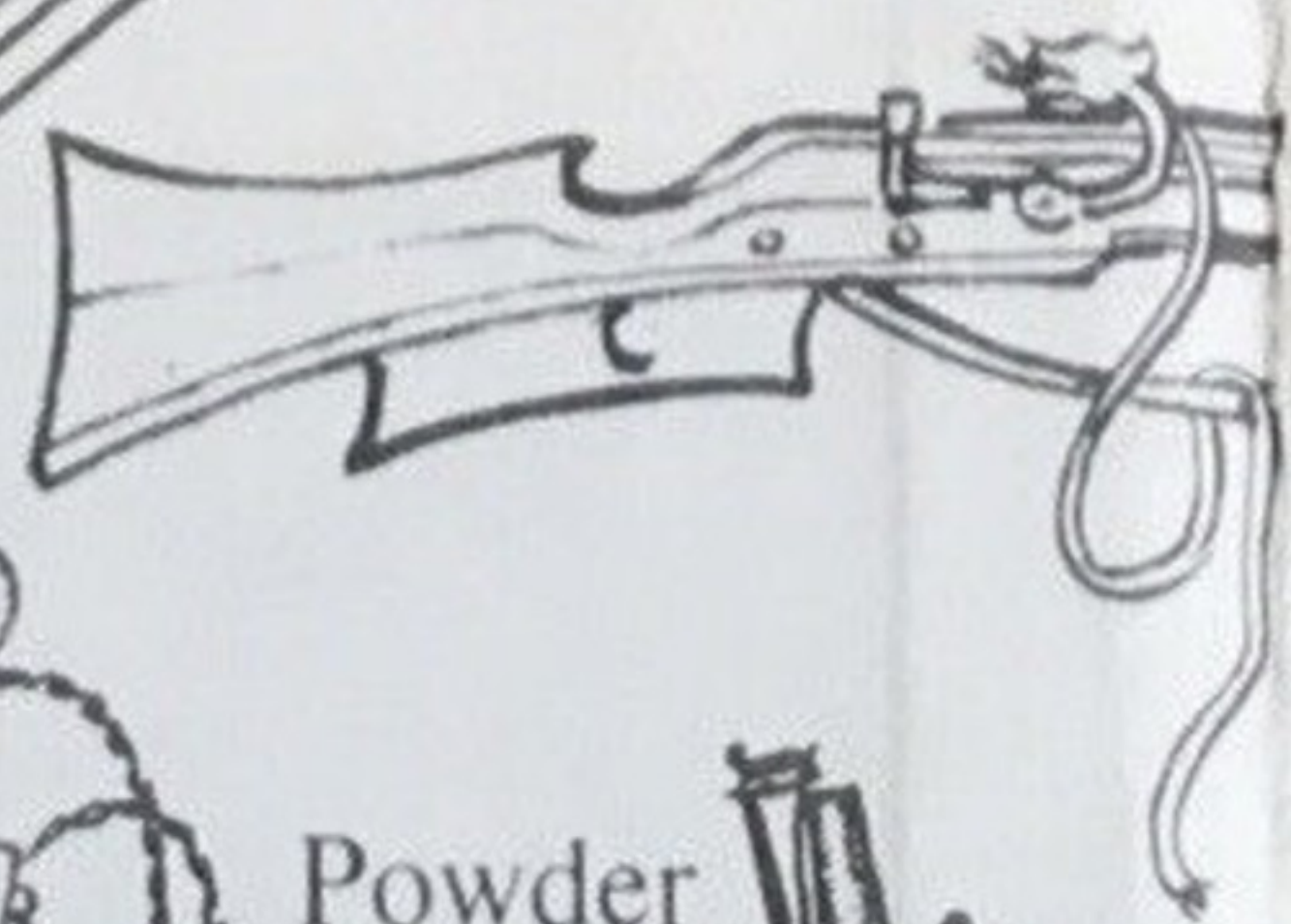
GUNPOWDER PLOT

A LADYBIRD BOOK

An Adventure from History



A Musketeer



Powder
Flasks

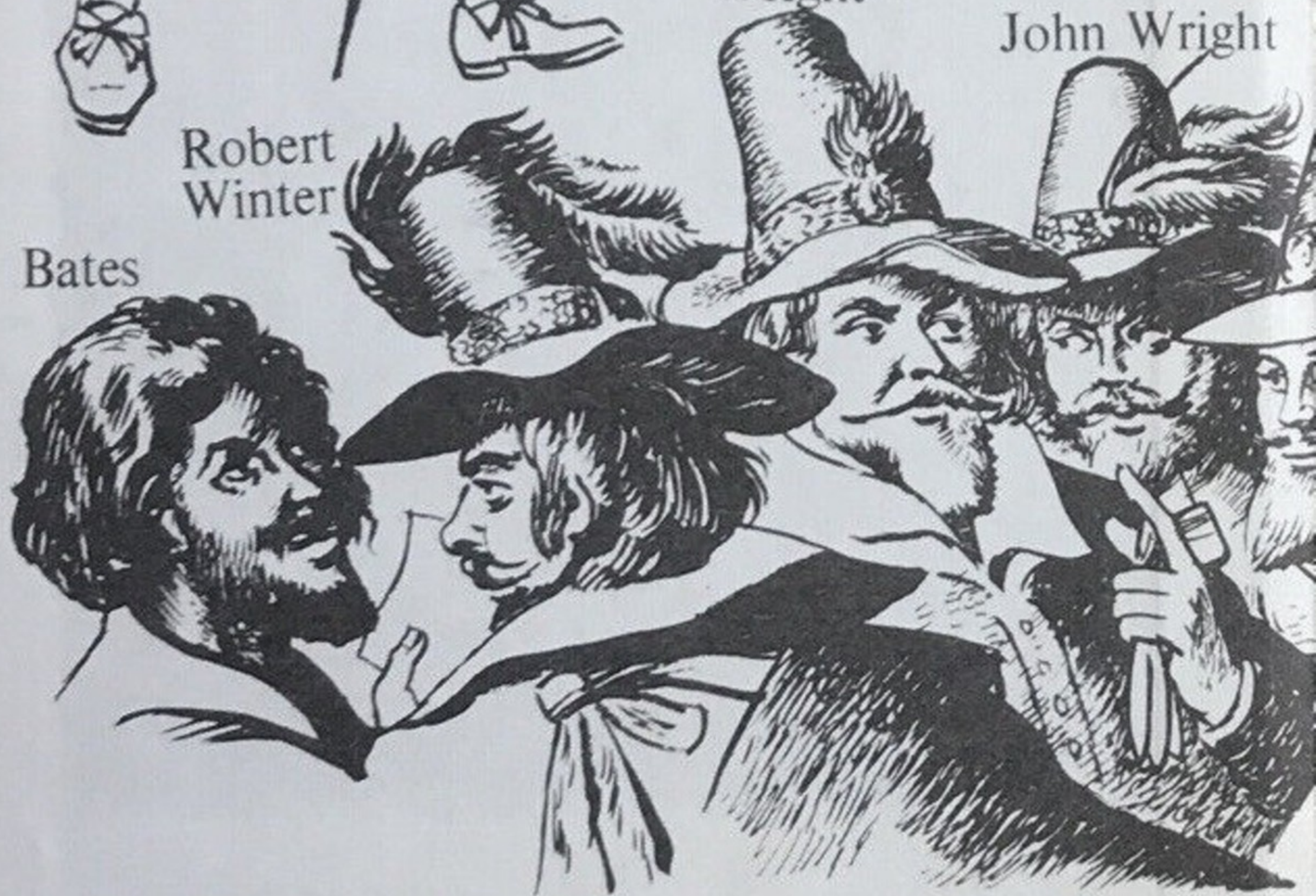


Christopher
Wright

John Wright

Robert
Winter

Bates



A Matchlock Musket

17th. Century
Armour

Wheel-lock Pistols

A Petronel

A Cannon

Thomas Perry

Guido Fawkes

Robert Catesby

Thomas Winter

The PLOTTERS
(from a contemporary print)



Series 561

King James I was an unpleasant man who was hated and distrusted by many people. This is the story of his reign, and of the famous plot which was almost successful in removing him.

A LADYBIRD
HISTORY
BOOK

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AN ADVENTURE FROM HISTORY

JAMES I and the GUNPOWDER PLOT



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JAMES I and the GUNPOWDER PLOT

Everyone in England knows that the fifth of November is Bonfire Night. For days, often weeks before that date, children may be seen carrying through the streets the stuffed effigy of a man, and singing a verse which begins :

*Please to remember the fifth of November,
Gunpowder treason and plot.*

Very often the effigy is dressed in old clothes of the present day, but occasionally some attempt has been made to imitate the costume of an earlier age. In either case the clothes are old, because the effigy is due to be burnt over a bonfire.

The effigy is known to such children as can give it a name at all, as 'Guy Fox', though the real name of the man whom it represents was Guido Fawkes. Although he was born at York, he had served in the Spanish army, and used the Spanish form of his name in his signatures.

Who was he, this man who is still burnt every year, hundreds of years after he lived? How many of the children who enjoy the bonfire and the fireworks on the fifth of November could tell you how it all started? This is his story, the story of Guido Fawkes and King James I.



When the great Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, she was unmarried. The English Crown had usually passed from the monarch to a son or daughter, but as Elizabeth had no heir, it went to the next descendant of Henry VII.

This was the Scottish King James VI, because a daughter of Henry VII had been married to his great grandfather James IV, King of Scotland, in 1503. James VI had already been King of Scotland for thirty-six years, having been crowned when he was only one year old.

The story is told of how one Englishman, Sir Robert Carey, successfully won the favour of King James. Knowing how much the Scottish King, who was very poor, was looking forward to becoming the King of England, Sir Robert arranged with his sister, who was one of Queen Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting, that she should signal to him from a window of the palace the moment Queen Elizabeth died. He waited with a horse ready saddled, and the moment he got the signal he galloped north to Scotland, arriving four days before the official messengers.

King James was so pleased at receiving the news of his accession to the English Throne that Sir Robert was at once created Earl of Monmouth.



King James was not a pleasant man. Not only was he of ungainly appearance, he was also untrustworthy and deceitful. Being so poor, he had to get money from England before he could travel in state to London, and having got it, his vanity made him give presents to all sorts of people on the way.

It was his vanity at finding himself King of England which also impelled him to confer the honour of knighthood on two hundred and fifty of the gentlemen who met him as he travelled south, thus considerably reducing the value of the honour.

The arrival of the new King in London was not a success. His lubberly, ungainly appearance, added to prejudice against the Scots, made him unwelcome. When plague broke out, and eight hundred and fifty-seven people died of it in London during the week of his coronation, it was looked on as a judgment for having accepted a Scottish King.

King James himself had every reason to be pleased. He had journeyed from a very poor, troubled, and barren country through rich peaceful England, where farms flourished on every side, to the prosperous City of London. He had never before imagined such wealth: it was for James a rich inheritance indeed.



King James I was often referred to as 'the wisest fool in Christendom', wise because he was in many ways a learned man, and foolish because he did many stupid things. This was due to the fact that he believed in what was called 'the divine right of kings'.

Henry VIII and Elizabeth had been clever enough to rule with the consent of Parliament: James insisted that the Members of Parliament were there simply to do as he told them. This did not suit the independent spirit of the English people, a spirit which neither James nor his son Charles I ever understood.

In addition to his frequent quarrels with Parliament, James earned the hatred of many of his subjects by his treatment of people with religious views differing from his own. He found the country already divided by the struggle between the Church of England, established by Henry VIII, and the Catholics, who had enjoyed temporary freedom under Mary.

Added to this was the growing power of the Puritans which, forty years later, was to break out in the Civil War. James, with his narrow religious views, managed to make them all hate and distrust him. From this hatred came the famous Gunpowder Plot less than two years after his coronation.



Until just over sixty years before James came to the throne, almost all the people in England had been Roman Catholics and there were still a great number of Catholics in the country. For five of those years, under Mary, they had been in power, and had persecuted the Protestants. Under Elizabeth this had been reversed. King James managed to make enemies of both sects. He was always ready to argue about religion, and to disagree on principle with anything in which others believed.

It was the Catholics who were persecuted most bitterly. Catholic priests were imprisoned or put to death whenever they were found, and this led to the building of strange hiding places, known as priests' holes, in many of the manor houses in England.

These old houses often had walls eight or ten feet thick, and small hiding places were hollowed out in them. The entrance was then concealed behind the panels of a room, and when the house was searched, there was nothing to show that the hiding place existed.

Often the priests had to remain in these tiny rooms for days together, and very uncomfortable it must have been. They were fed through tubes or holes left by loose bricks, and there could have been very little ventilation.



King James was not the only descendant of Henry VII with a claim to the throne. The Lady Arabella Stuart was his cousin, and there were those in England who were plotting to put her on the throne in succession to Elizabeth. She herself had no wish to be Queen, and for seven years she remained a favourite at the court of King James.

Unfortunately she was secretly married against the King's wish to a nobleman younger than herself. James was very angry, and Arabella was placed in the charge of the Bishop of Durham. Her young husband was sent to the Tower of London.

Arabella Stuart was a young lady of spirit and determination. When the order arrived for her to remove to the Bishop's Palace, she took to her bed and refused to get up. Unfortunately this did not help her. The King's officers removed the bed, with Arabella in it.

Although she was ill, Arabella did not give in without a struggle. By disguising herself as a man, and bribing the guards, she managed to escape and board a ship for France. However, she was soon recaptured by officers aboard a ship sent after her, and Arabella, brought back to England, died a prisoner in the Tower.



Arabella Stuart was probably innocent of plotting against James, but because she was thought by many people to have a claim to the throne, she was regarded by James as dangerous. In those days to be dangerous was often as bad as being guilty.

Arabella refused to have anything to do with the conspirators, but if successful they meant to proclaim her Queen of England. King James was so unpopular that many plots were hatched against him. The best known were the 'Main' and 'Bye' plots, in which both Puritans and Catholics were involved.

The 'Bye' plot was the more serious. The intention was to seize James when he was out hunting. He was then to be carried to a secret hiding place, and kept there until he granted to all people the right to be either Catholics or Puritans.

The most famous man accused of being involved in the 'Bye' plot was Sir Walter Raleigh, about whom you can read in another book in this series. He was innocent, but the King was determined to have him proved guilty, partly to please the King of Spain, who hated and feared Raleigh because of the many successful expeditions which he had led against the Spanish colonies.



The most serious plot of all was the one which has come to be known as the 'Gunpowder Plot'. This was a plot to blow up Parliament whilst King James was opening a new session.

It was a most wicked undertaking, because although it would have put an end to King James, many innocent people would have been killed at the same time. This does not appear to have worried the original conspirators, who did not care how many people suffered, so long as they got rid of King James.

When he first came to England, James had promised the Catholics that they would no longer be persecuted. No sooner was he firmly on the throne than he broke his promise, and the persecution of the Catholics became worse than it was before.

A group of Catholic gentlemen got together and determined to rid the country of a King whom they hated and despised, and who had so shamefully broken faith with them. Their leader was Robert Catesby. With him were, amongst others, John Wright and Thomas Winter, both of whom had suffered because of their religion. At first they hesitated, but Catesby persuaded them to join him in what was to prove a desperate undertaking.



It was at this stage that the man whose name is most associated with the Gunpowder Plot was brought into the conspiracy: Guido, or Guy Fawkes.

He was what is called a soldier of fortune. That is a man who is prepared to fight for any country which will pay him, and Guy Fawkes had seen service in the Netherlands with the Spanish army. He had been brought up as a Protestant, but had been converted to the Catholic faith, and was very ready to join in the plot against King James.

Guy Fawkes was not a fierce looking ruffian, though often on the fifth of November he is made up and dressed to look like one. He was a gentleman of good family, brave and religious, who was ready to risk everything for a cause in which he believed.

Robert Catesby had in the meantime recruited other conspirators, amongst them a relative of the Earl of Northumberland. These conspirators knew that some plot was being prepared, but they did not know what it was. Catesby now gathered them together, and they all took a solemn oath never to betray the plot to anyone. This done, he told them what he, with their help, proposed to do.



We can imagine the scene: a group of young men gathered in a candle-lit room behind locked doors, listening with tense excitement as Catesby unfolded the plot. There would be no sound except the low tones of Catesby's voice, as the conspirators realised the terrible nature of the undertaking upon which they were engaged.

Catesby had taken a house next door to the Houses of Parliament, and he proposed that they should dig a tunnel from the cellar of the house, under the House of Lords. There they would pile barrels of gunpowder, and when the King and all the Members of Parliament, including the Peers of the House of Lords, were assembled, there would be an explosion which would leave nothing but a smoking ruin.

As Catesby ceased, the conspirators were silent, looking at one another with startled eyes as they pictured to themselves the awful result of the explosion.

No doubt Guy Fawkes smiled. He was used to explosions and to the idea of hundreds of men being killed in battle. It was to be his task to set fire to the fuse, and then to escape as best he could. A man of iron nerve, he had no doubts about his part in the conspiracy.



Work was commenced in December on the digging of the tunnel, but as all of those engaged on it were gentlemen unused to such labour, progress was slow. By Christmas Eve they had not reached the House of Lords, and the opening of Parliament was fixed for February 7th. The conspirators separated for Christmas. When they recommenced work on the tunnel early in 1605, they learnt that the opening had been postponed until October 3rd.

It was then that Catesby heard of a cellar which was to let, right under the House of Lords. The cellar was taken, and Guy Fawkes, under the name of Johnson, was installed as the servant of the new owner.

The problem was how to get the explosives into the cellar without rousing suspicion. It would seem an impossible task, but small barrels of gunpowder were ferried across the Thames by night, and taken one by one into the cellar. In all, about two tons of gunpowder were stored ready for the fatal day.

It is difficult to-day to believe that a cellar under the House of Lords should be 'to let' for anyone to take, and even more difficult to understand why no-one knew that gunpowder was being stored in it. But this is exactly what happened.

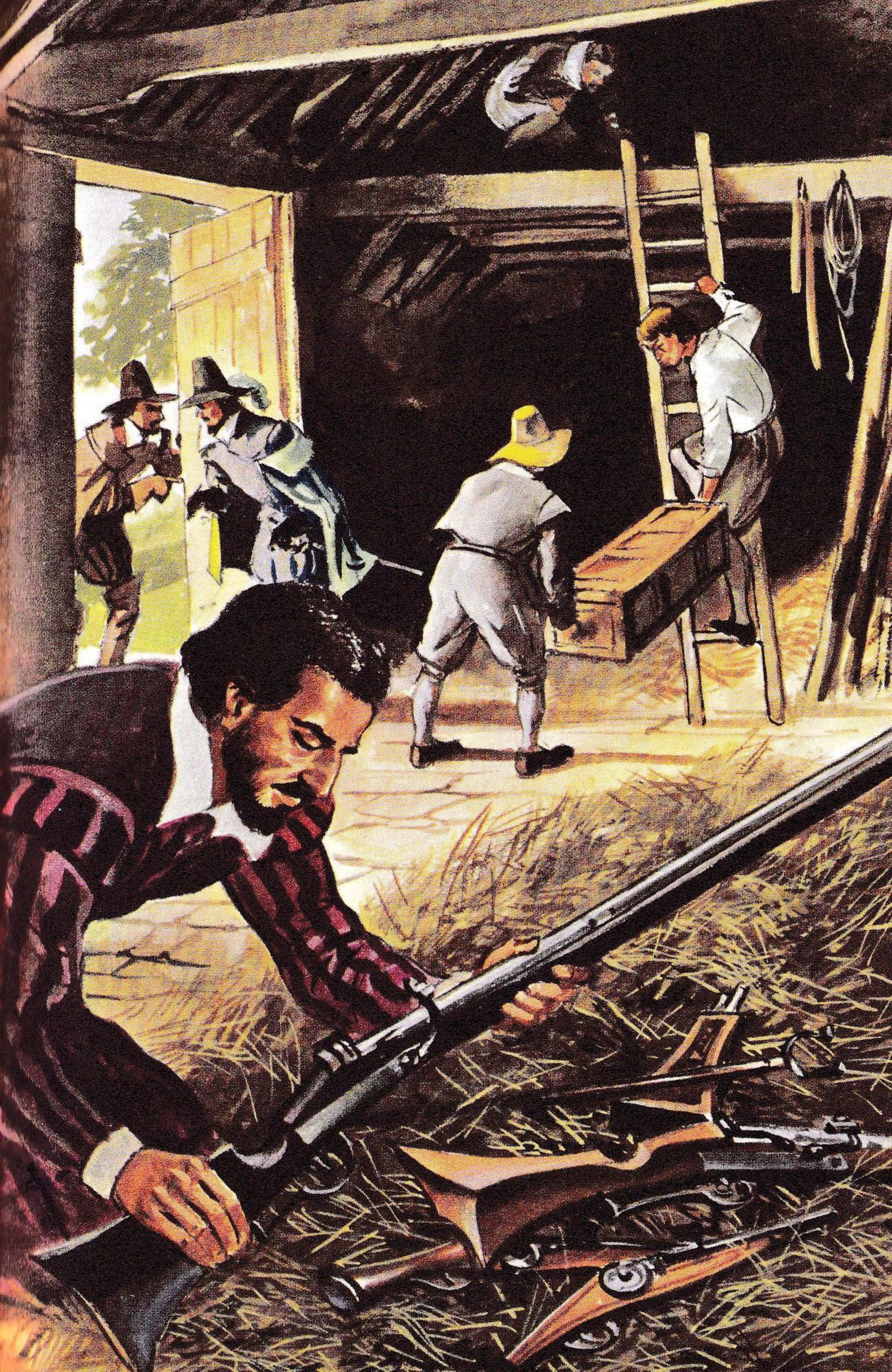


The conspirators led by Robert Catesby had of course decided on what was to be done after King James and the Houses of Parliament had been blown up. The Princess Elizabeth, a daughter of King James, was at once to be proclaimed Queen.

It is interesting to wonder what the result would have been if this had really happened. Princess Elizabeth was afterwards married to a German Prince, and it is from this marriage that our present Royal House is descended.

It was clear to Catesby and his friends that there would be fighting to be done before the followers of King James would agree to the accession of the Princess Elizabeth. They made elaborate plans for meeting, and arms and ammunition were stored in various parts of the country. They hoped that the Catholics of England would at once rise in their support.

It was now that they made a mistake which was to have fatal consequences for all of them. A man named Francis Tresham, who was related to Catesby, was admitted to the plot. Money was needed to buy arms, and Tresham promised to give two thousand pounds. It was never paid, but the promise was dearly bought.



The conspirators had all left London in May, agreeing to meet again in September. They went to different parts of the country in order not to arouse suspicion by being seen together.

In September they returned to London, ready for the opening of Parliament in October. But again the opening had been postponed, this time until November 5th. This made Catesby and his friends fear that their plot had been discovered, and Guy Fawkes was sent to inspect the cellar. The door had not been opened.

Unfortunately for the successful carrying out of the plot, the postponement had another consequence. Some of the conspirators began to have serious doubts about what they were doing. Several of them had friends or relations who would be in the House on the opening day, and they naturally wished to warn them to stay away. Catesby was strongly against doing anything which might arouse suspicion, and reluctantly the conspirators agreed to keep silent.

It was probably Francis Tresham who broke the agreement. He had a brother-in-law, Lord Mounteagle, to whom he sent an anonymous letter ten days before the opening of Parliament. In this letter he wrote: "I advise you to devise some excuse not to attend this Parliament, for they shall receive a terrible blow, and yet shall not see who hurts them."



Lord Mounteagle immediately showed the letter to the Lord Chancellor, and Catesby soon heard that a mysterious communication had found its way to the authorities. He was already doubtful about Tresham's good faith, and he charged him with having sent it. Tresham indignantly denied that he had anything to do with it, and it has never actually been proved one way or the other. But suspicion against Tresham was very strong, and it is probable that the letter was written by him.

There had been nothing in the letter to direct suspicion to the cellar, but the conspirators were anxious to find out whether anyone had been to search it. Guy Fawkes was sent to inspect the security precautions.

Every time they left the cellar, those who had been working there stretched a piece of cotton across the door, or arranged some device which would show whether the door had been opened. Guy Fawkes found everything in order.

He reported back to Robert Catesby, and though some suspicion of Tresham remained, the conspirators were confident that the actual nature of the plot had not been disclosed. They decided that everything should go forward as planned, hoping soon to rid the country of the hated King James.



Leaving Guy Fawkes in London, the conspirators rode south and west, to be ready to rouse the country after the death of the King. They would have been better advised to have left England for the Continent. They probably thought that as their plot had already gone so far, and the date of the opening of Parliament was so near, they could safely remain a little longer.

They were wrong.

As a soldier, Guy Fawkes was used to danger. He avoided it when he could, but he was not given to imagining it where in his opinion it did not exist. He was scornful of the fears of the other conspirators, and calmly took up his post in the cellar to wait for November the fifth.

In order not to arouse suspicion, he was to remain hidden in the cellar as much as possible, and he no doubt busied himself in seeing that everything was in readiness. A long fuse had to be prepared and placed in position. It was to be so devised that it would burn for half an hour or more before exploding the gunpowder. This would leave him time to get well clear of the building, and aboard a boat waiting for him on the Thames. He was then to join the other conspirators.



On November the fourth, the day before that arranged for the opening of Parliament, Guy Fawkes was in the cellar, probably rather bored with waiting, but suspecting no danger. Suddenly there was a loud knocking at the door, and instantly alert, he went to open it.

Outside he found Lord Mounteagle and the Lord Chancellor. They asked him who and what he was, and he replied that he was a servant of Thomas Percy. Percy was one of the conspirators, and the cellar had been hired in his name.

The two men glanced into the cellar and seemed satisfied. The barrels of gunpowder had all been hidden under stacks of firewood, and there was nothing to show that it was not such a store of winter fuel as anyone might keep. Lord Mounteagle and the Lord Chancellor went away.

Guy Fawkes saw them clear, then he locked up the cellar and went to report to Thomas Percy, who had remained in London. Although there was no reason why Lord Mounteagle and the Chancellor should suddenly decide to visit a cellar, unless they had some suspicions concerning it, Thomas Percy refused to believe that there was any danger. Guy Fawkes apparently agreed with him. He returned calmly to the cellar to wait for the next day.



The end came at midnight. A magistrate and a file of soldiers suddenly appeared, and in spite of his struggles Guy Fawkes was overpowered and securely bound.

A search of the cellar very soon showed that the piles of firewood were not as innocent as they appeared. The thirty or more barrels of gunpowder were quickly uncovered, and it was no longer possible for Guy Fawkes to keep up the pretence of being merely a servant looking after his master's supply of fuel.

A guard was placed on the cellar, and Guy Fawkes was taken away. He had good reason to be sorry that he had not been more suspicious of the unexplained visit by Lord Mounteagle and the Lord Chancellor.

He knew that out in the country, Robert Catesby and his fellow conspirators were waiting anxiously to hear that the first part of the plot had been successful, and that the King was no more. It was impossible for him to let them know that the plot had failed. When they found out, it would be too late for them to find safety in flight. Their preparations for rebellion would be discovered, and few of them were likely to escape trial for treason.



When King James heard of the arrest of Guy Fawkes, he ordered him to be brought before him. James was a man who could never leave things to men better qualified than himself. He questioned Guy Fawkes at length, without getting anything out of him.

Guy Fawkes admitted that his intention had been to blow up the Houses of Parliament. As the gunpowder could have been in the cellar for no other purpose, there was not much point in denying it. He knew that his life was forfeit in any case, and he was indiscreet enough to add some very insulting remarks about King James and those who had come with him from Scotland.

This was not calculated to please the Scottish King. He fumed and shouted with rage, as did all the Scottish favourites who surrounded him. Only Guy Fawkes remained calm.

Although apparently indifferent to his own fate, he refused to give the names of the other conspirators. This did not save them. Whether their names were disclosed by Tresham is not known, but it was not long before they knew that they were hunted fugitives. Those who were still in London galloped to join the others, and soon many of them were gathered at Holbeach.

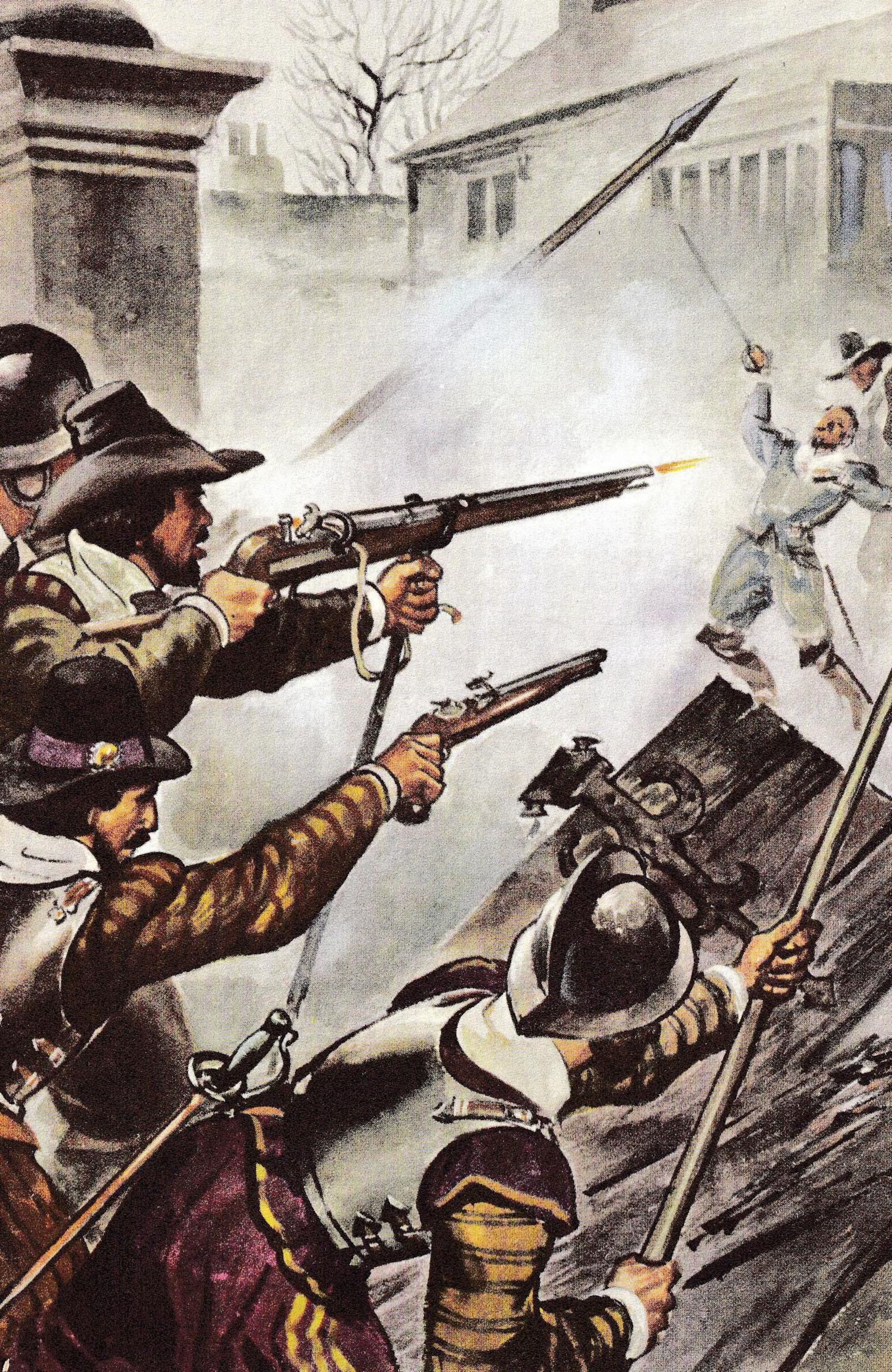


The conspirators were desperate men. They knew that there would be no mercy for them, and the only thing which remained was to make what resistance they could before they were killed. They all realised that to die fighting was preferable to falling into the hands of King James.

The plot had failed. Attempts to rouse the Catholics to action against the King were now useless. None joined the conspirators, and the masses of the people, many of them neither Catholics nor Puritans, were not going to risk their lives in a cause which was obviously doomed to failure.

The conspirators had not long to wait. Orders had been given to take them, dead or alive. Soon, looking from the hastily barricaded windows, Catesby and his misguided friends saw armed men cautiously approaching. The fighting was fierce and without quarter. Catesby was killed at the first assault, but the doomed men fought on. Not until they were too weak with wounds to resist any longer, were any of them taken prisoner.

All were executed, with the exception of Francis Tresham. For the sake of appearances he was sent to the Tower, but he was not harshly treated, further evidence that it was probably he who had betrayed the plot. When he died shortly afterwards, poison was suspected but never proved.



Guy Fawkes was barbarously tortured to make him give the names of the conspirators. For a long time he refused, but as most of them were known, it did neither them nor him any good. He was dragged on a sledge to a place of execution and hanged.

Thus died a man whose name has quite wrongly and mistakenly come to mean anyone of queer or foolish appearance. Guy or Guido Fawkes was neither. He was a brave man and a gentleman, a faithful friend to the limit of endurance, ready to die for the faith in which he believed.

We can be sure that never again were the cellars under the House of Lords let during the reign of James I. Nor have they ever been let since.

Even to this day a careful search is made of them before the opening of Parliament. This has of course become a picturesque ceremony rather than a necessary precaution. The search is not carried out by policemen or detectives from Scotland Yard, but by a party of the Yeomen of the Guard in their Tudor uniforms, armed with pikes. Solemnly they parade through the cellars: nothing suspicious is ever found.



One result of the Gunpowder Plot was to make King James suspicious of everyone and everything. Harsher laws were passed against the Catholics, and they were persecuted worse than before. The Members of Parliament were the more ready to pass such laws because they had themselves been badly frightened: if King James alone had been threatened, the consent of Parliament would probably have been more difficult to obtain.

James was not mad in the strict sense of the word, but he felt himself to be in a foreign country, ruling over a people who hated and resented him. He was frightened. The Scots who had come with him to England were frightened no less, and frightened men can never be trusted not to do foolish things. It was this ever-present fear which prompted many of the stupid actions of the reign of James I.

James was both mean and cunning. In Scotland he had been poor, and at the mercy of both the Scottish lords and the Scottish clergy. Now he found himself in a rich country, with bishops who flattered him for their own ends, and a Parliament which he believed existed only to supply him with unlimited money.

He was wrong. Soon bitter quarrels broke out between the King and the House of Commons, and James even went to the length of sending for the records of the House, and tearing out the pages which offended him.



Very little had been done in England to encourage trade with China and the far East until the reign of Elizabeth, although stories of its wealth had been current since the travels of Marco Polo, two hundred years earlier. The adventures of Marco Polo are recounted in another book in this series.

The ports of Bristol, Boston, and Hull were already sending ships to the Scandinavian countries, and as early as the reign of Richard III trade had been increasing in the Mediterranean. Now the merchants began to dream of rich profits to be made by importing the silks and spices of the East.

There were always sailors in England ready to brave distant seas. Now the merchants were more than ever ready to fit out ships for what they hoped would be prosperous voyages. Everyone now knew that the earth was round, and that China could be reached by going round Cape Horn or the south of Africa.

These passages were long and dangerous, and many of the voyages in the days of Elizabeth and James I were attempts to find a way to India and China by the north-west passage, round the north of Canada. All failed, but many new lands were discovered. More important for the trade of Britain, goods began to arrive from China and the East in greater abundance than ever.



It was no thanks to the mean-spirited, cowardly King James I that his reign saw the real beginnings of what afterwards became the British Empire.

Already in Queen Elizabeth's reign attempts had been made to colonise the new lands to the west, now the United States of America. Two men, the great Sir Walter Raleigh and his cousin Sir Humphrey Gilbert, had obtained a patent from the Queen in 1578 to found a colony in the New World. Five years later, three ships set sail and dropped anchor in what is now the harbour of St. John's, Newfoundland. Although the attempt failed, this adventure paved the way for the beginnings of the British Empire.

Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have spent forty thousand pounds of his own money in colonising ventures, chiefly in Virginia, so named after the Queen.

It was not until the sailing in 1620 of the Pilgrim Fathers, men and women who found life in England under King James impossible because of the bitter persecution which he imposed, that the first permanent British Colony was founded. They landed from their famous ship, the 'Mayflower' in Massachusetts, and named their settlement Plymouth, after the English port from which they had set forth. Thus the United States of America really owes its beginnings to the stupidity of a narrow-minded English king.



If we look at the introduction to the Authorised Edition of the Bible, we shall find that it is dedicated to 'The most high and mighty Prince James, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland.' It is difficult for us to recognise in this dedication the meanest and most bigoted king the country ever had.

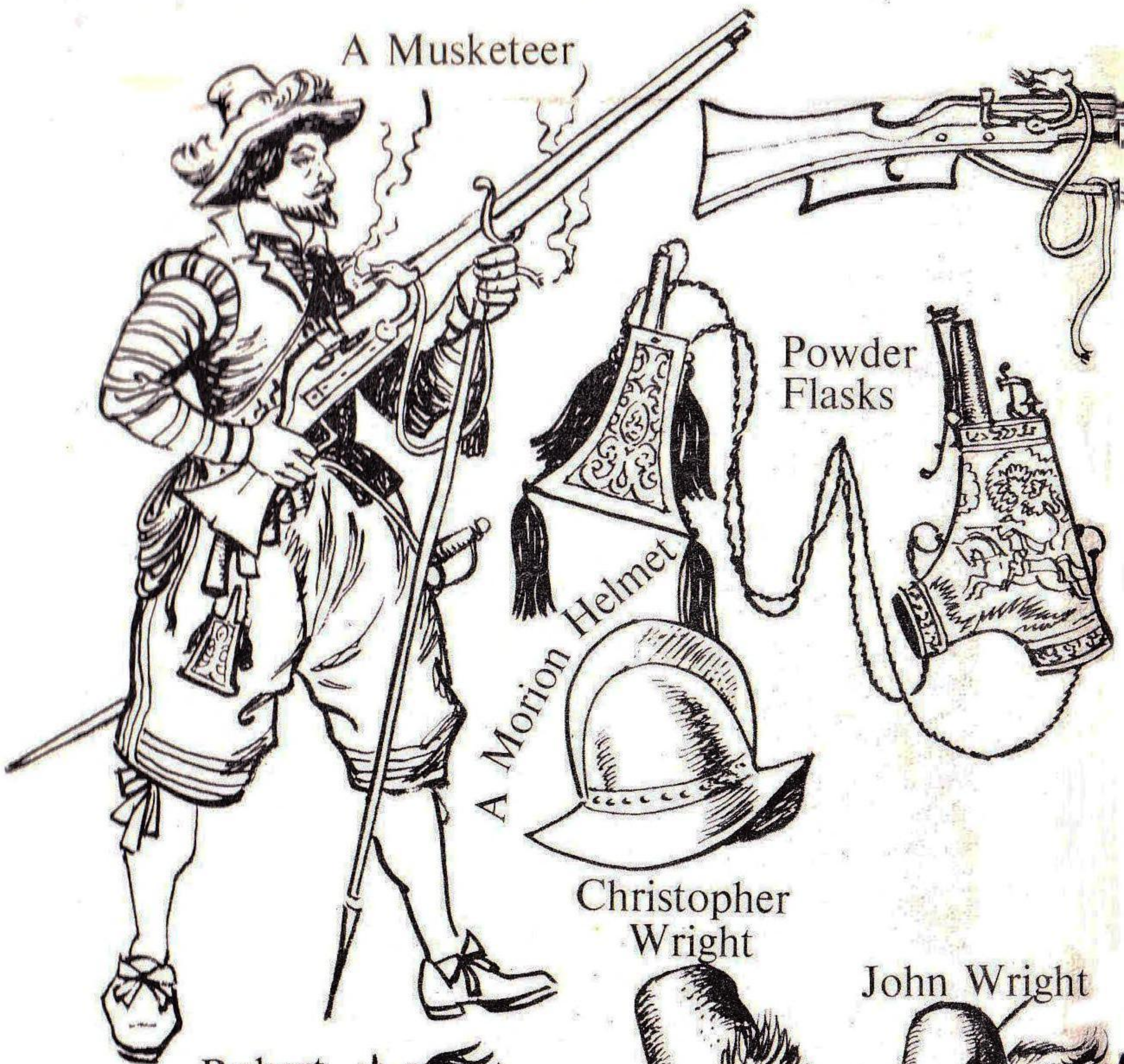
On the title page we read that the Bible had been 'diligently compared and revised by His Majesty's special command'. This is true. The King called a conference at Hampton Court a few months after he came to the throne, and directed the greatest scholars of the period, 'to the number of four and fifty', to make a new translation of the Bible.

Between them, these scholars knew every language into which the Bible had been transcribed. Dr. Andrews, afterwards Bishop of Winchester, is said to have known Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, Greek, Latin, and ten other languages: William Bedwell was the finest Arabic scholar in Europe.

The work was started in 1605, but it was seven years later that the new Bible was published. It is fortunate that the work was done in the period when the English language was at its best, enriched by Shakespeare and the Elizabethan poets.

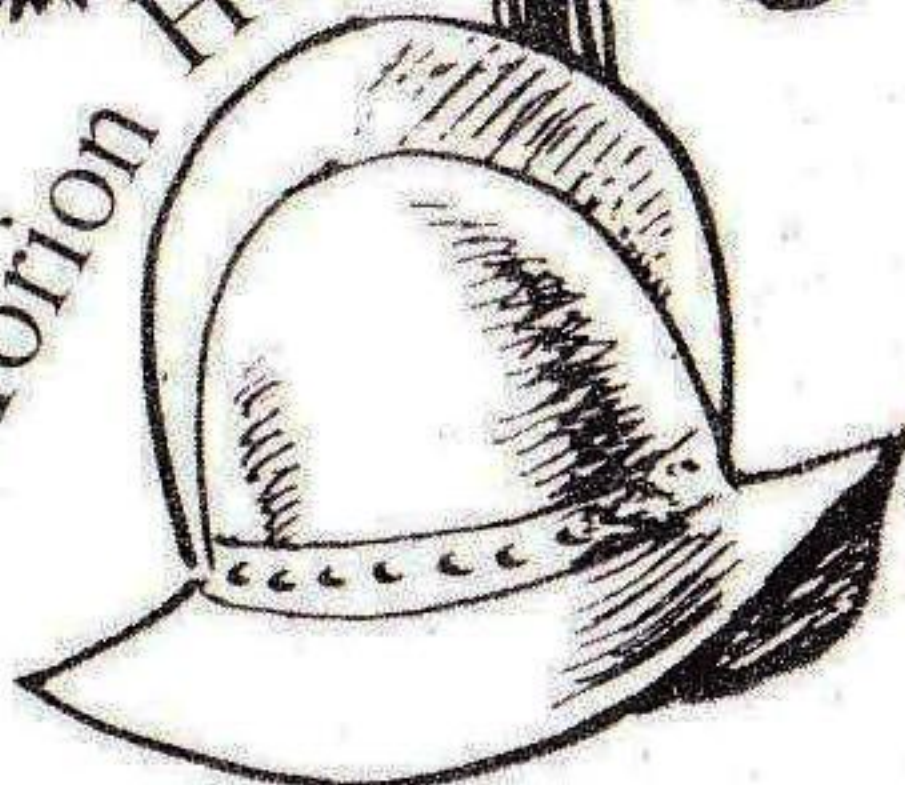


A Musketeer



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17th. Century
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The PLOTTERS
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